

GEORGE COHEN

RICHARD FEIGEN GALLERY

January 13—February 27, 1960

53 East Division Street, Chicago

The modern artist makes his pictures as the ancient made his gods. So wrote Malraux with George Cohen in mind, no doubt. Rarely in our day do we find one so committed to his art as a dedicatory ritual. There is an obsessive need to fashion out of his hands and mind an autonomous object, expressive in its articulation of a deeply felt inner experience. A mystical, occult search for a secret self, the existential core of subjectivity, becomes for Cohen a metaphysical attitude toward meaning, purpose and ultimate reality.

With the felicitous technique of collage at his command, Cohen juggles reality and irreality with an interplay of painterly images and bizarre material, including mirrors, rope, hair and parts of dolls. These fragments from the world of actuality bring the hidden and the overt into a mysterious relationship that adds dimension and meaning to them both.

The mirrors reflect the ephemerality of things seen, set against the eternity of time, which pervasively dominates the image in the painting. The effect is a mysterious expression of reality in an ambiance of unconscious neo-Dada and Surrealist symbology, having an orientation at once modern and archaic—ancient myths in a contemporary romantic idiom.

Cohen's topsy-turvy, disjointed figures floating in precarious imbalance are disciplined by a strange logic of irrationality, made credible through the alchemy of his art. By a feat of presti-levitation he deftly succeeds in sawing, not the lady, but the spectator in half.

*Much of Cohen's generative power springs from the folk quality of his art—a crude, earthy, peasant simplicity with a humor, protean and cathartic; but withal a sense of awe and fear that renders his art essentially tragic. For Cohen too, with heraldic omens and portents, offers his contribution to the new myth of man in our time — an exploration and redefinition of his condition and destiny. It is this dedication which casts Cohen in the heroic mission of the artist, whose prophetic quest was poignantly told by James Joyce in his *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*:*

"Welcome O' life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race".

JOSEPH RANDALL SHAPIRO

Chicago
December 20, 1959

CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITION

1. MARRIAGE PORTRAIT. 1948-49. Oil on canvas. 40½" x 30"

exhibited: "Artists of Chicago and Vicinity", The Art Institute of Chicago (1951)

Lent by Mr. and Mrs. John Metzberg, Chicago

2. AVENGER. 1950. Oil, wax, casein and ink on masonite. 48" x 27¼"

exhibited: Contemporary Arts Gallery, Chicago (1950)

discussed: ART NEWS (October, 1955), p. 37

Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Edwin W. Eisendrath, Jr., Chicago

3. FLIGHT. 1950-51. Oil and cloth on canvas. 24" x 36"

exhibited: "Exhibition Momentum", Chicago (1951)

reproduced and discussed: CHICAGO (March, 1955), p. 54



4. WOMAN IN CLOAK. 1951. Oil and cloth on masonite. 36" x 20".

discussed: ART NEWS (May, 1955), p. 49

Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Arthur P. Feigen, Chicago

5. KALEH. 1953. Oil and gold leaf on masonite. 49" x 28".

reproduced: ART NEWS (May, 1955), p. 49

exhibited: "New Talent", Museum of Modern Art, New York (1957),
no. 2

discussed: ARTS DIGEST (May 15, 1955), p. 28

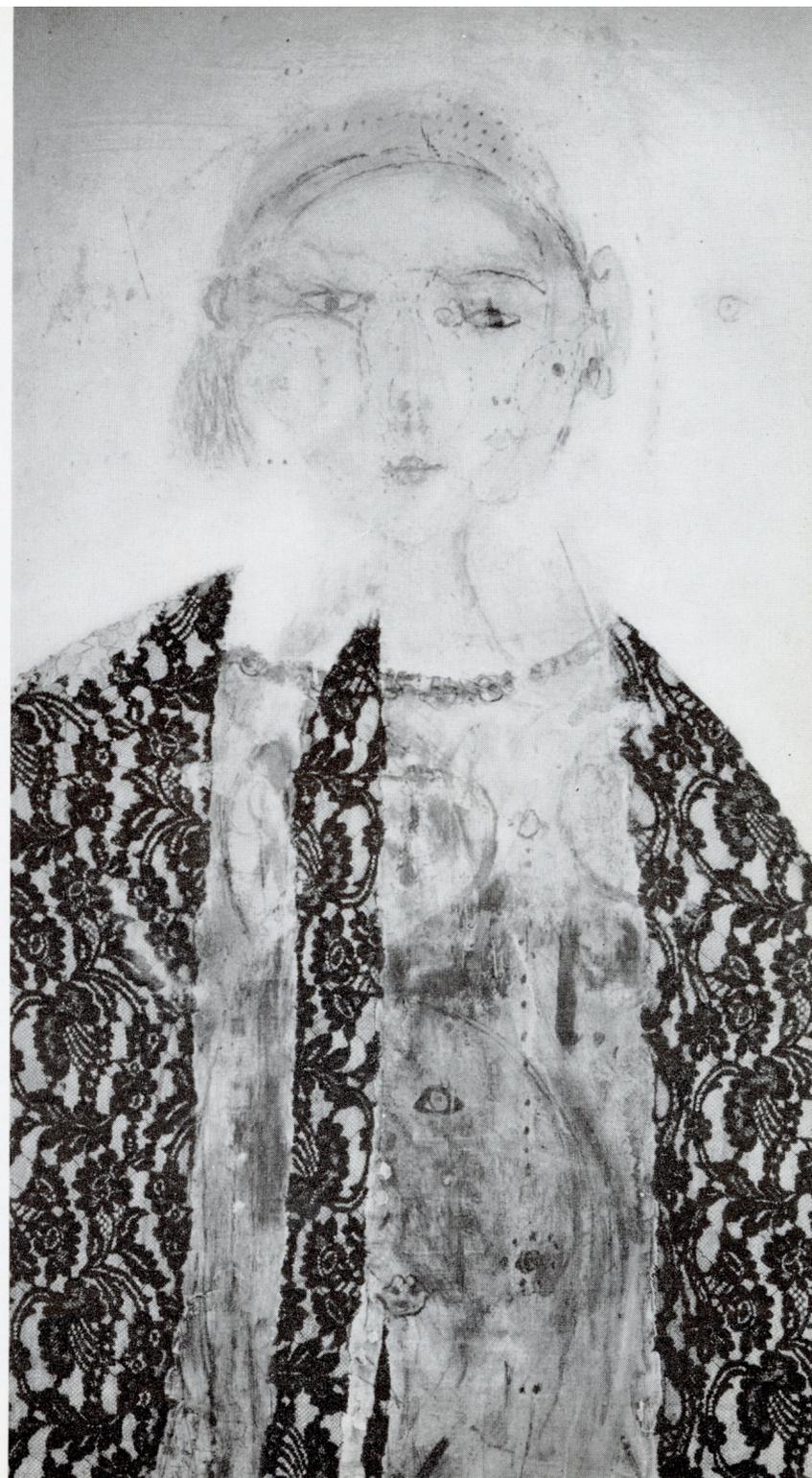
Lent anonymously

6. DANCING GIRL. 1953. Oil, aluminum leaf and glass on canvas.
41" x 30".

reproduced and discussed: ART NEWS (October, 1955), p. 37

exhibited: "New Talent", Museum of Modern Art (1957), no. 1

Lent by Mimi McEwen, Chicago



7. AUGUR. 1954. Oil and gold leaf on canvas. 44" x 44".

discussed: ARTS DIGEST (May 15, 1955), p. 28

Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Joseph R. Shapiro, Oak Park, Illinois

8. EMBLEM FOR AN UNKNOWN NATION I. 1954. Oil on masonite. 68" x 51½".

exhibited: "Exhibition Momentum", Chicago (1956)

Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Albert Newman, Chicago

9. GAME OF CHANCE. 1955. Metal, wood, plastic and glass on wood. 12½" x 34".

exhibited: "Exhibition Momentum", Chicago (1956)

"New Talent", Museum of Modern Art (1957), no. 4

reproduced: "New Talent" catalogue, (1957)

discussed: ART NEWS (May, 1957), p. 11

Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Sam Hunter, Minneapolis

10. WHO MAY BE CALLED MAN. 1956. Oil, cloth and paper on masonite. 58¼" x 48".

*exhibited: Society for Contemporary American Art Exhibition,
The Art Institute of Chicago (1957)*

Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Burt Kleiner, Beverly Hills, California



14. HERMES. 1957. Oil and sandpaper on canvas. 46" x 36".

exhibited: "The New Chicago Decade, 1950-1960", Lake Forest College (1959), no. 5

reproduced: "The New Chicago Decade" catalogue, p. 11
"Important Recent Acquisitions", Richard Feigen Gallery (1960), no. 13, p. 7

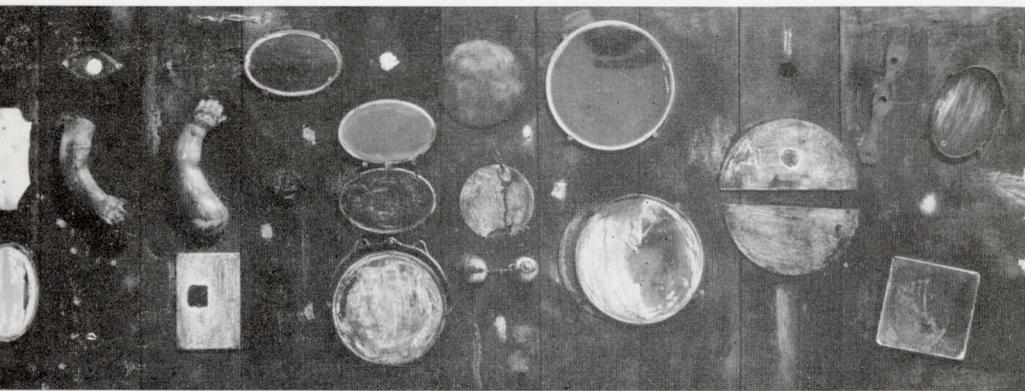
reproduced in color and discussed: ART NEWS (October, 1959), pp. 41, 52

Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Joseph R. Shapiro

15. GAME PRESERVE. 1957. Metal, wood, plastic and glass on wood. 12½" x 34¼".

exhibited: "Out of the Ordinary", Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston (1959)

reproduced: "Out of the Ordinary" catalogue



15.



14.

"... Cohen's ... paintings and collages range from single enigmatic figures set off indelibly, like emblems, against relatively plain backgrounds to complex, multiple images which seem to emerge through layers of space and time—as on surfaces of ancient palimpsests. In Cohen's HERMES, for instance, immediately above the profile of a "primitive" face drawn in sgraffito over the blurred mass of a still larger head there hovers a cluster of such improbable forms as the high-heeled shoes and slim legs of a flapper, two plummeting bodies (one vermilion, the other deep blue), a compass-like emblem made up of four hands and two militant breasts resembling a lobster-claw—all of them suddenly culminating in a demonic yellow death's head. Somehow, out of this apparent anarchy of disparate organisms and beautifully painted passages there emerges a single magical presence". Thomas N. Folds, ART NEWS (October, 1959).

George Cohen salvages fragments of his experience, physical and psychic, making collages of paint, paper, mirrors, hair, wood, and other flotsam and jetsam. He calls one GAME PRESERVE, appropriately enough, a title suggesting keepsakes from human play. Or, using such titles as HERMES, PERSEUS, MAENAD, AUGUR, etc., he recalls for us the old Mediterranean myths and declares the nature of his own symbols. Out of his autobiographical chaos an order of echoes is formulated, each picture employing the products of a deep sea change, each one offering a rich harvest dredged up from the ocean of his fantasy.

GORDON B. WASHBURN
*Director, Carnegie Institute,
Department of Fine Arts*

*Pittsburgh
December, 1959*

The contemporary artist, perhaps to counteract the hostile forces he feels in the world around him, often tries to dominate the spectator with his own world. Many painters, unfolding enormous canvases, create their own visual surroundings. George Cohen in his emblematic mirror collages has made objects which bring the spectator under his power by commanding self-reflection. Using mirrors—the ultimate in illusion—Cohen has shattered conventional space illusions by the immediacy of subjective confrontation. The mirror, in significant relationship to the painted signs, transports the observer into the center of the reality of the artist's object.

Cohen's collages are not cubist design composition, nor are they the literary metaphors of surrealism: they have their own reality; they have their own reality; they exist for themselves for themselves to be used by the spectator as a type of profound toy by means of which he may play his way into a new environment.

PETER SELZ
Museum of Modern Art

*New York
December, 1959*

16. GRISAILLE. 1957. *Oil on canvas. 33" x 21".*

Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Root, Chicago

17. GRISAILLE II. 1958. *Oil on canvas. 58½" x 29".*

*exhibited: "Corcoran Biennial", Corcoran Gallery, Washington, D.C.
(1959)*

discussed: ARTS (November, 1959), p. 56

18. CIRCULAR. 1958. *Oil and metal on canvas, diameter 22".*

discussed: ARTS (November, 1959), p. 56

Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Burt Kleiner

19. LIMBUS. 1958. *Oil, rope, glass, paper and hair on canvas. 42" x 34½".*

reproduced and discussed: ARTS (February, 1959), pp. 48, 50

*exhibited: "The New Chicago Decade, 1950-1960", Lake Forest College
(1959), no. 6*

Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Joseph R. Shapiro



19.

20. THE WOMEN. 1958-59. Oil on canvas. 72" x 50".

discussed: ARTS (November, 1959), p. 56

21. INCUBUS. 1959. Oil on canvas. 34" x 22".

Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Burt Kleiner

22. FIGURE IN INTERIOR. 1959. Oil on canvas. 74½" x 47".

*exhibited: "The New Chicago Decade, 1950-1960", Lake Forest College
(1959), no. 8*

Lent by Sterling Holloway, Encino, California



23. RED MAENAD. 1959. Oil on canvas. 72" x 60".

discussed: ARTS (November, 1959), p. 56

exhibited: Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana (1959)

24. BIRTH OF VENUS. 1959. Oil and glass on canvas. 41" x 51".

discussed: ARTS (November, 1959), p. 56

25. OVAL NUDE. 1959. Oil on canvas. 60" x 30".

reproduced: TIME (September 7, 1959), p. 62

discussed: ARTS (November, 1959), p. 56

26. MARKET WOMAN. 1959. Oil on canvas. 33" x 21".

Lent by Sterling Holloway



23.

" . . . These are very human paintings; it is impossible to categorize them, and they are difficult of comparison. At their best—their most precise—they have a way of turning painted space inside out, of presenting their figure image in a condition as precarious as it occupies now, not only in art, but in life. And they become themselves, in their very method (their APPROACH) an analogy of that condition. The figure-image and the painting of it are, paradoxically, reconciled here. This is quite singular in contemporary painting."

Anita Ventura, ARTS (November, 1959)